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Author(s): Jaime W. RootsSource: *Marvels & Tales*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (2018), pp. 406-425

Published by: Wayne State University Press

Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.13110/marvelstales.32.2.0406

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Fannish Storytelling and Interpreting the Fairy-Tale Narrative

The fairy tale collection *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (Children's and Household Tales) by the Brothers Grimm (1785–1863; 1786–1859) has been widely acknowledged to have been edited and changed throughout the lifetimes of the collectors. Yet, the changes that occurred while Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm were alive hardly compare to the level of adaptation and reimagining the tales in their collection continue to experience long after the publication of their final 1857 collection. Indeed, Kay Turner and Pauline Greenhill describe the longevity and adaptability of the fairy-tale genre:

> The long-lived history of oral and literary fairy tales offers remarkable testimony to their enduring popularity. Certainly no other folk narrative genre has been as widely told and retold, interpreted and reinterpreted, or translated into other art and performance forms: ballet, folk dance, films, novels, short stories, games, cartoons, and graphic and other visual arts. (2)

With the advent of the Internet, new means of reinterpreting and distributing these tales have developed, notably including fan fiction. Written by media fans for other fans and simply defined as stories based on other (usually published) works, fan-fiction versions of the Grimms' tales challenge traditional notions associated with the fairy tale, such as gender roles, the stark contrasts between good and evil, or even the possibility of fairy-tale figures living "happily ever after." While the Grimm anthology presents a

Marvels & Tales: Journal of Fairy-Tale Studies, Vol. 32, No. 2 (2018), pp. 406–425. doi: 10.13110/marvelstales.32.2.0406 Copyright © 2019 by Wayne State University Press, Detroit, MI 48201.

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polished, consistent narrative of how the Grimms believed the Germanic fairy tale should sound and how Germanic culture should be presented, fan fictions adapting these same tales in Germany today often confront the holes or inconsistencies in this narrative—showing that no single voice can represent a country and its culture, but rather a multitude of opinions and voices and the existence of multiple narratives are necessary. This essay focuses on stories classified under the category of "Grimms Märchen" (Grimms' Fairy Tales) in the German-language site *FanFiktion.de* to explore this fandom and its metanarrative engagement with the genre as a space for feminist critique and also to highlight the relevance of fan fiction to the study of fairy tales today.

Fan writing displays a creativity within boundaries (Stein and Busse 197) as fan writing by its very definition is based on already established themes and characters. Yet, fans often use these same boundaries to foster explicit discussion of what they have altered in order to open up the possibility of multiple, even contradictory narratives. That is, fan fiction "defines itself as a way to take familiar story elements and ask 'what if?'" (Kustritz, "Fan Fiction" 509). It is a genre that exists to play with narrative.

Fan fiction (also known as "FF," "fan fics," or simply "fics") is not something that is entirely new, but the Internet has profoundly affected its scope and distribution, causing a recent, revolutionary change. There are many different interpretations of when fan fiction began to be written—some estimations state that it began as early as John Lydgate and Robert Henryson's extensions of Geoffrey Chaucer's work, whereas others argue that it did not begin until the 1970s with fan extensions of *Star Trek* TV series (Black 11). Yet, what we see in fan fiction, no matter where its origins lie, are changes, adaptations, and reinterpretations of published material. Importantly, as well, fanfiction communities, even (if not especially) in pre-Internet times, have been comprised nearly entirely of women writers. Although this gender statistic has been slowly changing over time, many fandoms still remain a space dominated by female-authored transformative works (Hellekson and Busse, "Fan Identity" 75).

Studying Internet fan fiction on a large scale is not within the scope of this article; rather, I focus on one of the largest strictly German-language sites *FanFiktion.de* and its stories classified under the category of "Grimms Märchen" (Grimms' Fairy Tales). *FanFiktion.de* specifies that all fan fiction must be written in German, and the vast majority of "Grimms Märchen" fandom members reside within Germany. Of those who self-reported their country of residence, 87% lived in Germany, while 96% lived in a predominantly German-speaking country. As of July 2015, there were 118 fan texts written by 90 users between the ages of 12 and 34, which ranged anywhere from less

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than 100 words to over 40,000 words in length. Over 90% of users self-reported their gender on their user profile, and, of those, 88% identified as female—showcasing the overwhelming majority of women in this online space. This fandom is also of particular interest in relation to studying the evolution of the fairy tale in German culture, as fans directly engage with the Grimms' tales as central to the fairy-tale canon while simultaneously rewriting and critiquing the tales, often engaging in metadiscussions of the genre. I likewise narrow my focus because, as Kristina Busse and Karen Hellekson note, it is impossible, even perhaps dangerous, to speak of all fan fiction as a single genre since fandoms revolving around different media often have strikingly different rules and expectations from one another (6).

Though fan fiction has become increasingly studied by scholars, close readings and literary analyses of particular fan texts—that is, fan texts read for their own sake rather than as a study of fan culture—remain the exception rather than the rule (Hellekson and Busse, "Fan Fiction" 24). Here, I focus on the fan community of "Grimms Märchen," which can be seen as a feminist space responding to patriarchal aspects of the source texts, or canon texts, as they are referred to in fannish writing. Investigating these works of fan fiction can show, on the one hand, the continuing longevity of the fairy tale and the appropriateness of Internet fan fiction as a medium for fairy-tale adaptation and, on the other hand, the possibilities that fan fiction opens up for women to offer different and even contradictory interpretations of the Grimms' tales. More specifically, I discuss the changes in two works of fan fiction based on the Grimm tales "Snow White" (Sneewittchen) and "Little Briar Rose" or "Sleeping Beauty" (Dornröschen).

Within an investigation of the adaptable, indeed the "volatile and fluid" (Zipes, *Irresistible Fairy Tale* 22) nature of the fairy-tale genre, I examine how these two fan-fiction versions reimagine classic Grimm tales by complicating gender roles in the traditional tales and creating a space in which women's concerns are brought to the fore. In analyzing the two fics, I have adapted three categories of change common in fan fiction from Henry Jenkins's seminal book on fan culture, *Textual Poachers* (162): (1) moral realignment: representing unjust violence and repositioning classically evil characters in a different light; (2) emotional intensification: delving into psychological aspects of the tales; and (3) refocalization: changing the focus in tales to either promote a new main character or represent characters as more self-sufficient than portrayed in classic German fairy tales.

In using Jenkins's categories of change, I aim to highlight the importance and relevance of both fan studies and fan fiction in the continued investigation and understanding of the fairy-tale genre. Fan fiction, itself a

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transformative process, allows, invites, and even expects a multiplicity of voices in the interpretation of source texts. Investigating fan fiction that engages with fairy-tale source texts either directly or through employing fairy-tale themes and tropes is an important extension of fairy-tale scholarship. The fairy-tale genre has been repeatedly described as multifaceted and characterized by "diversity and dissonance" (Haase, Introduction 12); it is a genre that "resists a definitive reconstruction of 'original' meaning and even invites contradictory responses" (16). Likewise, both fairy-tale and fan-fiction cultures have been described as offering "key critical alternatives to mass-mediated storytelling in their ability to undermine the coercive inevitability of any one ending" (Kustritz, "They All Lived" 6). Then, bringing fan fiction and fan studies together with fairy-tale studies is the merger of two "volatile and fluid" genres in which the "diversity and dissonance" already inherently present in the fairy tale is actively exploited by fans.

Pauline Greenhill and Sidney Eve Matrix write that "the fairy tale genre has long been a shape shifter and medium breaker" (3), and this medium-breaking ability has enabled the fairy tale to quickly adapt to the Internet and thrive in a medium that is never considered by fans to be final or complete, that never reaches a definite interpretation. The very existence of fan fiction, of texts that supplement or challenge the source text, suggests that completeness or an end state is actually impossible (Coppa 231). The purpose of fan fiction has always been multiple: it is a genre that provides both entertainment and analysis, and it is both original writing and derivative (Hellekson and Busse, "Fan Fiction" 20). That is, fan fiction is a genre that can be said to thrive on seemingly endless concurrently existing interpretations: interpretations that neither confirm nor deny the validity of one another, but exist alongside one another, as well as alongside the Grimm tales on which they are based.

Through the medium of fan fiction, the texts in the "Grimms Märchen" fandom offer their readers different glimpses into the fairy-tale world rather than aiming to provide a single, definitive interpretation; they also offer interpretations that are overwhelmingly written by fans who self-identify as women, representing an online space where women can take control of the fairy-tale genre. As Donald Haase notes, the Grimms' fairy tales have never given the same answers to readers. What continues to keep fairy tales alive is the "potential to play whatever roles are given them, to have meaning conferred upon them, to give an answer to whoever asks the question" (Introduction 21). Thus, I investigate two adaptations of "Snow White" and "Briar Rose" to highlight the

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importance of investigating the medium of fan fiction in exploring the longevity and adaptability of the fairy tale.

"Oh what the hell, times have certainly changed. Now you probably have to rethink everything and adapt to today's times" (Ach was solls, die Zeiten haben sich wohl geändert. Jetzt muss man wahrscheinlich umdenken und sich der heutigen Zeit anpassen) (Cakolinchen)[1]: The Art of Fan Revision

Where the nineteenth-century fairy-tale collection *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* sought to create consistent representations of the traditional fairy tale, providing a narrative that could ostensibly connect bourgeois communities together and define a German national character,[2] the "Grimms Märchen" fandom on *FanFiktion.de* encourages and celebrates a multiplicity of voices. Interaction on the Web site is not limited to registered users; anyone with Internet access and fluency in German can participate on the site ("Nutzungsbedingungen"). And while the writers within the fandom update, modify, and reinterpret the tales found within the Grimms' edition, they actively discuss the changes they have made with fellow fans, inviting further interpretation and exploration via online comment sections, forums, and chatting tools.

Fan-fiction writers can be said to be "transformative fans"—individuals who are critical of the media they consume. They likewise disapprove of passive-audience models and create artifacts to express their criticisms (Hellekson and Busse, Introduction 4). These online collaboration tools have indeed become so important to the fan-fiction writing process that Steven Thorne and Rebecca Black write that "these types of participatory features are common enough in reviews of online fan fiction that they might be considered an integral part of the genre" (271).

As fan fiction moved to the Internet from its earlier home in print magazines (such as the fics examined by Camille Bacon-Smith in her 1992 book on fandom, *Enterprising Women*), the space for fannish storytelling has been expanded. No longer do writers need to rely on physical distribution of their fics within relatively small groups of fans; instead, the Internet offers many new options to share "small-scale" stories in various corners of the globe (Lundby 3). As already noted, the *FanFiktion.de* "Grimms Märchen" fandom consists almost entirely of people who self-identified as women writers and thus could be said to be a space where women feel comfortable reimagining and rethinking the fairy-tale genre. Whereas women have traditionally been associated with the fairy tale—such as with the oral tradition of nursemaids and spinners—the canonical tales such as the Grimms', Charles Perrault's, and Hans Christian Andersen's are overwhelmingly male authored. Shawn Jarvis

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writes that it is "actually specious to suggest that there has been a 'male domination of the genre.' What there has been is a male domination of the *canonical* genre" (120). And, in these pieces of fan fiction, women transform the canonical tales to be more answerable to their interests.

On *FanFiktion.de*, the writers themselves identify their fandom as "Grimms Märchen," and it is because of this self-identification that I compare the fics that follow with the 1857[3] versions of the Grimm tales. Though many of the tales on the site clearly refer to versions by Perrault, Andersen, and Walt Disney, the fics have all been subsumed on the site under the larger title of "Grimms Märchen." For these fan writers, the Grimms have come to represent the *true* or even *original* interpretations of fairy tales—even if the version of the tales that the fics are based on does not stem from the Grimm collection. Jack Zipes writes that the Grimms' tales and their interpretations have become "the cultural bread and butter" of most children (*Fairy Tales* 66), and Heinz Rölleke has likewise noted that, since the middle of the nineteenth century, Germans have grown up learning to read with the Grimms' tales (12). This overgeneralization in the Grimm fandom attests to the massive success and influence that the Grimm editions have had on representations and expectations for the fairy-tale genre.

Sneewittchen

The fic "Schneewittchen" (Snow White) out of the series "Märchen – wie es wirklich war" (Fairy tales—how it really was) by farfalla91, shows many deviations from the 1857 Grimm edition of "Snow White"—emphasizing the roles and struggles of female, rather than male, characters and focusing on the notion of female solidarity. The Grimm version, quoted here in one of its English-language translations, describes Snow White and the prince's wedding after the evil stepmother arrives:

> At first she [the stepmother] would not go to the wedding at all, but she had no peace, and had to go to see the young Queen. And when she went in she recognized Snow-white; and she stood still with rage and fear, and could not stir. But iron slippers had already been put upon the fire, and they were brought in with tongs, and set before her. Then she was forced to put on the red-hot shoes, and dance until she dropped down dead. (258)

The Grimm tale presents what has become a classic trope of maternal evil. The queen, introduced in this version as Snow White's stepmother, instantly cues the reader to see her as a depiction of rage and jealousy toward a young rival. Indeed, Maria Tatar writes that "folklorists would be hard pressed to name a single good stepmother, for in fairy tales the very title 'stepmother' pins the badge of iniquity

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on a figure. One can safely argue that the phrase *wicked stepmother*, which has a nearly formulaic ring to it, is pleonastic" (141). The stepmother in the Grimms' "Sneewittchen" adheres to her formulaic role. The goal of destroying her more beautiful stepdaughter guides all her actions, including her final moment of jealousy and hatred that brings her to visit her stepdaughter's wedding uninvited. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar note that "the central action of the tale—indeed, its only real action—arises from the relationship between these two women." "Sneewittchen," they write, is a tale detailing the trials of the angel-woman, Sneewittchen, and the monster-woman, the queen (26).

Farfalla91's version, however, describes a different story. Importantly, the tale depicts the queen as having a strong relationship with her own mother, and she uses the famed magic mirror to converse with her mother whenever she wishes. The queen is described as taking the gift of the mirror only "under tears" (*unter Tränen*) as she parted from her "loving mother" (*von ihrer lieben Mutter*). After the queen marries the widowed king, farfalla91's tale states, "[T]he queen hoped to be as good a mother for this child as her own mother had been for her" (Die Königin hoffte, für dieses Kind eine ebenso gute Mutter zu sein, wie ihre eigene Mutter es für sie gewesen war). Rather than presenting the queen as a "flesh-eating witch" figure who desires to eat her stepdaughter's lungs and liver, a maternal figure gone bad (Warner 310), farfalla91's version presents an image of true maternal care. This depiction of the stepmother imaginatively demonstrates how the roles of these female characters could be improved by making them more answerable to women's interests (Penley 183).

In this fan fic, Snow White, who is presented as a spoiled princess, runs away from home of her own accord because she tires of the queen's emphasis on ruling the people of her kingdom benevolently rather than spending the wealth of the kingdom on clothing and jewels. The stepmother uses her magic mirror to watch over Snow White even when the princess is away. By assuring herself that no harm will come to Snow White while she is out in the world on her own, the queen waits for the time when Snow White has matured enough to be trusted with ruling over an entire kingdom. After living with the dwarves and learning what it is to work for oneself, Snow White has satisfactorily shown the queen that she has changed enough to be trusted to rule. As she travels to the dwarves' home to bring Snow White back to the castle with her, the queen learns that Snow White has suddenly agreed to marry a prince she has only just met, and the queen attends the wedding despite not being invited. The adapted tale reads,

> When the stepmother approached Snow White after the ceremony to wish her well, Snow White began to cry as she recognized her stepmother. She ran over to the queen and hugged her.

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> "Why did you come?" she asked through tears. "You aren't safe here. No one is safe here."
>
> For the first time the queen noticed the bruises on Snow White's arms, which were only meagerly covered by the edges of her sleeves. "Believe me, my arms look completely innocuous [*harmlos*]."[4]

Later, the tale details that the prince has abused Snow White and that she fears for her stepmother's safety.

Feminist revisions of fairy tales tend to be "confrontational and provocative" (Zipes, "Struggle" 185), and here farfalla91's tale confronts the male exploitation of Snow White in the Grimm version—the treatment of her character as a prize for the prince in the end. As Grimm tales often model rewarding passive and silent women (Jarvis 106), here the scene explores what the price of such passivity can be. Upon seeing the bruises, the stepmother vows to rescue her stepdaughter, but the prince learns of their plan. He speaks with the stepmother, and we learn of his sadistic intentions:

> The prince laughed kindly . . . "would you give me the honor of a dance?" . . .
>
> "I would only be too glad," she replied and took the arm the prince had offered her. He led her to a fire which burned in a large fireplace.
>
> "I have some very special dance shoes prepared for you," he mentioned while they made their way through the crowd.
>
> "Oh, I like dancing in my own shoes," answered the queen and asked herself what he was up to.
>
> On a gesture from the prince, a servant fetched the iron shoes from the fire which were glowing from heat.
>
> "What do you think, how long can you dance in those before you fall over dead?" the prince pondered. "A minute? Or perhaps an hour?" . . .
>
> "Two gold coins that she can't even take one step!" someone howled and, in the next moment, the air was filled with the buzz of voices. Bets were offered and exchanged, and speculations were made of just how such shoes might feel and, first and foremost, was laughter . . .
>
> Two guards now held the queen tightly while the prince personally bent down . . . and violently stuffed her feet in the glowing shoes . . .
>
> Half-delirious from pain, she stumbled here and now there until the prince caught her.
>
> "Music!" he yelled and, as the musicians began to play once again, he whirled the screaming woman through the entire ballroom.

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> The guests applauded and jeered as the queen suddenly fell to the ground. Alone, Snow White stood in her wedding dress among the guests and cried.[5]

This fic displays instances of emotional intensification and moral realignment. There is extreme emotional intensification with the character of Snow White in both her reaction when she sees her stepmother, as well as at the end of the tale when she is forced to witness her stepmother's death. Rather than simply state that the stepmother must dance to death in red-hot iron shoes as in the Grimm version, farfalla91's tale depicts the moral debasement of the prince and of the guests at the party who jest, jeer, and place bets on how long the stepmother will be able to stay alive. The fic details the final, terrible moments of the stepmother's life and how much she suffered. Many fan writers see their readings and interpretations as "teasing out the subtext" (Hellekson and Busse, "Fan Identity" 76)—that is, in this case farfalla91 teases out the exploitation of Snow White. Fans often read the source text against its historical and cultural context (76), and here the weight of living in a society that demands female obedience and passivity is brought to the fore.

There is also moral realignment in the important fact that it is the prince who is evil. Likewise, the stepmother has been cast in the role of a savior, though she is not successful. It is important to note that, in the Grimm tales, princes are often of noble character and save princesses from helpless situations. In tales like "Cinderella," "Snow White," "Sleeping Beauty," and "Rapunzel," the princess in some way or other feared for her life but is rescued in the end by a loving and well-intentioned prince. In classic Grimm tales such as "Sneewittchen," the heroine must learn to be "passive, obedient, self-sacrificing, hardworking, patient, and straight-laced," and her happiness depends on how well she conforms to patriarchal rule (Zipes, *Fairy Tales* 69). Likewise, heroes are presented as dominant figures and work to protect the virtues of humbled "if not humiliated" female characters (150). In the Grimms' tale, as Sneewittchen learns these traits, she is rescued by a prince and rewarded for her adherence to patriarchal norms. Farfalla91's tale details a similar journey: one of a young woman learning to be passive and obedient, hardworking, and straightlaced. Like her fellow Grimm heroines, farfalla91's Snow White seeks salvation through marriage. Yet, despite fully conforming to these expectations, she is not united at the end with a male savior. Perhaps in a perverted attempt to protect Snow White's virtues and to ensure that she remain passive, the prince succeeds in humiliating her into obedience at the end of the tale as she is forced to watch her attempted savior, this time a woman, die in agony in front of her.

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The Grimm version of the tale presents a scene of seemingly justified violence at its conclusion. The greedy and, as is pointed out in the tale, "godless" stepmother is punished for her wicked life and the maltreatment of her stepdaughter. Sneewittchen is rewarded for her good, obedient nature and kind heart by marrying a prince of wealth and high status. The reader is given the satisfaction of a conclusion where, in the end, all is as it should be as the evil queen has been punished and the kindhearted woman now rules over her own land. In farfalla91's version however, the final scene is of senseless violence, one that does not provide the reader with a simple solution. The reader is left with a glimpse of a corrupt world in which the good are not only punished, but tortured, and the wicked are rewarded. The prince is free to live and torture, and the tale ends with the ominous scene of Snow White sobbing in the middle of a jeering crowd. There is no simple resolution, and the reader is left to imagine the life Snow White will lead while married to an abusive man. This fan fiction presents a rejection of such clear-cut morals as provided in the Grimm version with the added affirmation that the world is often a senseless one in which the just are punished and the unjust rule—drawing attention this time to female suffering in a patriarchal world where women place their happiness in the hands of powerful men.

Stories such as "Sneewittchen" are continually retold because they have some sort of resonance in the storyteller's life. Fairy tales lend themselves so easily to revision and reinterpretation because they consist of "chaotic symbolic codes" that have become highly ambiguous—and this ambiguity invites diverse responses (Haase, "Response" 235). A story that is continually retold does not necessarily need to be well constructed or even well told, but it likely does need an interesting plotline that leaves ample room for interpretation. And here fan fiction and the fairy tale come to a united front, as fan fiction can be understood only through an idea of supplementation and reinterpretation. Its very existence is one that refuses an illusion of continuity of the source text—seeking to "fill in the gaps" by acting as if all readings of the source text were equally possible (Willis 166–68), indeed not just inviting but expecting continual reinterpretations and diverse responses.

Additionally, the medium of fan fiction allows versions of the Grimms' tales, such as farfalla91's, to potentially reach international audiences—and likewise encourages communal storytelling. While the changes farfalla91 has made may be interesting on their own, the responses to her tale show the importance of the fan-fiction community and its dependence on participation. Fan communities are often self-aware of the roles the texts play as transformative works (Hellekson and Busse, "Fan Identity" 76). In the comment section, other fans openly engage with the idea of changing and updating tales. While the average fic in "Grimms Märchen" garners between one and six fan

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comments, farfalla91's received nine, showing an above-average popularity for the fandom. One fan writes,

> One can see that you have really considered all of the details that need to be changed and really . . . everything makes so much sense that one could believe that the fairy tales actually happened this way in reality and it was only through rumor that they became what we know today:)[6] ("Reviews")

In farfalla91's response to this comment, she addresses the idea of bias in the source text and expresses interest in exploring other possibilities of the stories—ones that are multifaceted and with morals that are not so clear-cut. In this online format, we can likewise see the parallels to folkloristic retellings. Fan fiction can function as the cultural equivalent of collective storytelling (Hellekson and Busse, "Fan Fiction" 21) because fans engage in metadiscussions of the changes that have been made—often suggesting further changes or alterations in the comment sections. Farfalla91 writes here (also referencing her fics based on "Little Red Riding Hood," as well as "Hänsel und Gretel"),

> You recognized my main point: To write a story that the known fairy tales could have originated from, be it because they were only orally passed down (here a human "evil wolf" becomes an actual animal) or because only one side of the story is told (so that a friendly herbalist becomes an evil witch).[7] ("Reviews")

The two fans directly address the changes and variation inherent in oral storytelling and suggest that eventually details change, and, out of complicated matters, simple explanations arise. The comments show a wish to (re)introduce differing or perhaps more complex aspects of the stories than the Grimm versions display, and the fans seem to recognize themselves as a part of that process—explicitly discussing the fairy-tale genre itself, as well as how and why one might renegotiate themes and plot. Farfalla91 is transparent in her changes, actively discussing the implications of her alterations with fellow fans. Other fans likewise express enjoyment that the characters in farfalla91's texts were no longer black-and-white portrayals of good and evil. They note that they came to feel sympathy for Rumpelstiltskin, as well as the witch in "Hansel and Gretel," or with a version of "Briar Rose" that portrays the princess not just as sweet and innocent, but with malevolent characteristics, as well ("Reviews").

Fan texts often work to expand the canon text in many directions by focusing on media that have "expandability built into their structure" (Stein 247). The conversation between farfalla91 and a fellow fan highlights the view of fan fiction expanding in potentially infinite directions. Farfalla91 does not claim to have written a definitive version, but simply one that *could* represent

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another side to the Grimm tale. Every fairy-tale retelling is a transformation as well as but a fragment (Greenhill and Brydon 136), and farfalla91 seems to recognize the fragmentary status of her tale. Writers in "Grimms Märchen" reframe, repurpose, and recreate characters, events, and settings to open up the source text to myriad interpretations. And, importantly, these interpretations are overwhelmingly written by women who are often confronting the portrayal of female characters in the Grimm tales.

Dornröschen

The next comparison is between the Grimm 1857 version of "Briar Rose" (Dornröschen) and Sturmklang's "Once upon a Bloody Time: Hier ist die Dorne, aber wo bleibt das Röschen?" (Here Is the Thorn, but Where Is the Little Rose?) In the Grimm version when the prince is introduced, he is described as a fearless character determined to save a cursed princess:

> After long, long years a King's son came again to that country, and heard an old man talking about the thorn-hedge, and that a castle was said to stand behind it in which a wonderfully beautiful princess, named Briar-rose, had been asleep for a hundred years; and that the King and Queen and the whole court were asleep likewise. He had heard, too, from his grandfather, that many kings' sons had already come, and had tried to get through the thorny hedge, but they had remained sticking fast in it, and had died a pitiful death. Then the youth said: "I am not afraid, I will go and see the beautiful Briar-rose." (240)

He will stop at nothing to rescue her. In the face of nearly certain death, the prince is convinced that his strength and goodwill will prevail, and his quest will be successful even where others before him have failed. In some way, he sees himself as exceptional—the one who is finally worthy of rescuing the imprisoned and enchanted princess. And the reader accepts at the beginning of the tale that the prince will be the exceptional one who makes it through the thorn hedge, as classic fairy tales do not tell the stories of the "many kings' sons" who failed, but sing the praises of the few who succeed. From reading this description, it is also clear that the Grimm tale "Briar-rose" focuses primarily on the prince and his journey. The story, although named after Briar-rose, celebrates the prince who seeks out adventure and is rewarded with a passive, silent, and hardworking wife. Similarly to the prince in "Sneewittchen," the "Dornröschen" prince is presented as a male savior figure—the one who will be able to bring about Briar-rose's "happily ever after."

In Sturmklang's version, however, the prince is described rather differently—complicating the portrayal of "masculinity" as presented in the Grimm tale. The

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new story begins "Once upon a time . . ./. . . there was once again such a ridiculous prince who tried to rescue a princess and marry her." (Es war einmal . . ./. . . schon wieder so ein lächerlicher Prinz, der versuchte, eine Prinzessin zu retten und sie zu heiraten.) Already it gives the reader the image of an unnecessary quest, and the tone of the tale suggests that the prince will most likely fail to win over the princess. Sturmklang's tale begins with the traditional fairy-tale opening of "once upon a time," but uses double ellipses and a line break, an exaggerated hesitation, to show that she intends to parody the image of the exceptional prince. Haase has noted that, throughout history, the fairy tale has served as a primary site not only for asserting but also for subverting ideologies of gender (Preface vii), and, in its opening lines, this version presents a clash of values with the Grimm tale. Sturmklang's version portrays the old trope of a gallant prince rescuing a helpless princess as tired, as well as not relatable to modern life. The princess does not need saving, the tale suggests already in its opening sentence. Here, the tale engages in an overt discussion of gender construction in canonical fairy tales.

In the Grimm version when the prince finally sees the innocent and pure Dornröschen, we read the description of a passive princess who silently awaits her rescuer as she is frozen in time:

> There she lay, so beautiful that he could not turn his eyes away; and he stooped down and gave her a kiss. But as soon as he kissed her, Briar-rose opened her eyes and awoke, and looked at him quite sweetly. Then they went down together, and the King awoke, and the Queen, and the whole court, and looked at each other in great astonishment. . . . And then the marriage of the King's son with Briar-rose was celebrated with all splendor, and they lived contented to the end of their days. (241)

The prince has succeeded in his endeavors. Here we see again that the tale focuses primarily on the journey of the prince: Briar-rose is described only through his gaze and his assessment of her as a fitting bride. His persistence has been rewarded, and Briar-rose has been freed from an evil curse. They live happily ever after—and he has not only been her savior, but the entire court's, as well. Yet, while the tale presents the success of the brave and fearless prince, it is one that has been described as presenting a "marvelous model of prudence for young women" (Zipes, *Fairy Tales* 52). Indeed, Kimberly J. Lau describes the more sinister implications of Briar-rose/Sleeping Beauty as a model aimed toward socializing girls:

> Sleeping Beauty (ATU 410) is the quintessential Grimms girl. Deep in slumber, she is nothing but a pretty face, a supple body there for the gazing, there for the taking. She is passive, yielding, available,

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> and—of course—silent, enchantingly incapable of speaking her mind, much less voicing any resistance to the hero's advances. (121)

In the Grimm version of the tale, Briar-rose directly speaks on one occasion only, when she discovers the cursed spindle—the object that will doom her to a deathlike slumber and silence. The only time Briar-rose makes a decision of her own in the tale, to touch the spindle, the decision brings about the downfall of the entire court.

In Sturmklang's version, their meeting ends quite differently. Much like the Grimm tale, the prince believes himself to be heroically rescuing an innocent and helpless princess. Once he finally sees her, however, she is not sleeping as he expects but walking freely around the castle. In Sturmklang's version, the story of Briar-rose is reimagined to center on its titular character and highlight her agency. This version of the scene consists almost entirely of Briar-rose's direct speech, and it is the prince whose speech is restricted. In the text, the prince speaks on but a mere four occasions and only in short questions directed toward Briar-rose, asking her for clarification. When she realizes the prince was expecting her to be peacefully asleep, Briar-rose exclaims,

> "I got so sick of this whole boring life! Constantly some idiots around me and these fairies—horrible! Constantly wanting to squeeze me into some sort of terrible, pink clothes and I never had a quiet moment.
>
> My only friend became, ironically, the bad fairy.
>
> I apologized to her for not being invited to the party. Then she helped me. She made everyone go to sleep, made the wall of thorns grow and I can finally do what I want—and I have my peace!"
>
> She sounded very pleased.[8]

Exasperated, Briar-rose details the gender norms that were thrust upon her by patriarchal rule. Rather than relishing the wealth, jewels, and expensive clothing fitting of her status as royalty, Briar-rose describes herself as limited by them. This fic is an example of refocalization. What was the tale of a heroic man rescuing a princess and marrying her so that she may be happy has become one in which the princess has grown tired of conforming to patriarchal expectations. Whereas the canon tale was focused on the journey and trials of the prince, Sturmklang's version focuses on the difficult life of the princess, which, before the thorn hedge grew to protect her, was defined by outdated notions of femininity. She no longer wishes to be the stereotypical princess in pink, surrounded by good fairies granting her the attributes of the supposedly perfect woman: beauty, grace, an even temper, musicality, ability to dance perfectly, and a beautiful voice (Zipes, *Fairy Tales* 39). She longs for her own life, free of the immense demands and expectations placed on a royal woman. Rather than having her

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life dictated by others, she wishes to finally live a life of her own. For her to achieve this, there is no room for a prince who is still taken with the ideals of stories written in the 1850s, as the prince in Sturmklang's tale appears to be.

Sturmklang's fic articulates a particular worldview—one that rejects traditional gender roles—and, by performing it openly on the site, her fic invites new perspectives and allows for a transformation of existing perceptions. Fan fiction is always both original and derivative. That is, Sturmklang's text exists alongside the Grimms' version; as the fic remains in constant conversation with the Grimms, it can actively analyze the source or canon text. The Grimms' "Dornröschen" is already well known to the fan readers, and her critique depends on this prior knowledge. Together, she and fellow fans discuss her changes and what it means to shift the emphasis away from the prince and onto the princess, shaping the tales within their community through participation rather than passive observance.

Sturmklang's fic was very popular on the site, receiving fifteen user comments, and the agreement and enthusiasm over what she has written are obvious, as fans directly engage with her challenge to stereotypical character and gender roles. One fan writes in the reviews,

> How the "princesses" have made themselves independent is great!
> This snappy manner, which one is not normally used to,
> is hilarious XDD[9]
> especially these (warning sarcasm) exceedingly smart little princes, simply terrific;) ("Reviews")[10]

The fans continue to remark on the agency of the princess in the tale. One fan writes simply and energetically: "WOMEN'S POWER!!!^^/Simply wonderful!" (FRAUENPOWER!!!^^ Einfach toll!). Another comments, "Woah!/I find it wonderful how you helped the 3 princesses to finally speak their minds to the princes!" ("Reviews").[11] No longer does the princess sit in a tower while waiting to be rescued; it is the prince who is described as lacking agency—driven merely by the tradition of the canon tale with no real will of his own. Indeed, in this tale, it is the prince, not Briar-rose, who is commanded to fall asleep. In the concluding lines of the fic, we read that "his eyes closed and the last thing he saw before he fell asleep—perhaps forever!—. . .was the grinning face of Briar-rose./And if he hasn't died, he's still asleep today!"[12]

Conclusion

These two writers' adaptations reframe, repurpose, and recreate characters, events, and settings within a fan-fiction community that prides itself on a multiplicity of fairy-tale reconceptualizations. It is listening for a multiplicity of

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voices that revitalizes the fairy tale (Bacchilega 66), and fics within the "Grimms Märchen" fandom display this process in a medium that lends itself well to the continual change and reinterpretation of fairy tales. These fairy-tale fan fictions showcase the enduring popularity and elasticity of the genre.

Fannish writing thrives online because of a sense of productive freedom borne of the transformations of published materials that fan writers are a part of. The two tales that I discussed present creative outlets by emphasizing pastiche, appropriation, and intertextuality within the constraints of working with and on published materials (Stein and Busse 193–95). In this way, the two fan writers do not seem to be outright rejecting the Grimms' tales—indeed, their fan texts could not exist without them and depend on their continued existence; but their rewritings show a clash of traditional and more contemporary values, signaled by the depiction of the fairy-tale prince and a modern Briar-rose in Sturmklang's tale, or the rejection of marriage as a "happily ever after" ending in farfalla91's tale.

The "Grimms Märchen" fandom likewise represents varied feminist responses to the patriarchal portrayals in the Grimms' tales. Fan fiction has been described as a "literature of the subordinate" since many fan authors are women responding to media products often characterized by an underrepresentation of women (Derecho 71). Though the Grimms' fairy tales are filled with female characters, their representation is often one of passivity and obedience. Here the two fan texts highlight the dangers of a patriarchal objectification ("Schneewittchen"), as well as the reclaiming of female voice and agency ("Hier ist die Dorne").

It is with fan fiction that a multitude of stories that previously would have remained within small circles of family and friends are able to potentially reach international online audiences. Individually, the two fics presented here show the fascinating longevity and flexibility of the fairy tale beyond the realm of literature in print and mass culture. Taken collectively, the fics within the "Grimms Märchen" fandom are symptomatic of the struggles and priorities of the communities to which the writers belong. When looking at how the fics themselves respond to one other, as well as how the fans receive and change them, we can arrive at a better understanding of the ever-changing nature of the fairy tale and of a feminist space where women can reclaim and reconsider the roles canonical fairy tales play in their lives.

Notes

1. All translations of German fan fiction and fan comments are mine.
2. See, for example, works in English by Jack Zipes, Maria Tatar, and Marina Warner, who have detailed the changes made by the Grimms during the collection and editing processes to conform the tales to nineteenth-century bourgeois ideals and expectations.

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3. The most widely read edition of the Grimms' tales.
4. Als sie nach der Zeremonie Schneewittchen gegenübertrat, um ihre Glückwünsche zu überbringen und diese ihre Stiefmutter erkannte, fing die junge Braut an zu weinen. Sie lief auf die Königin zu und umarmte sie.

   "Warum bist du gekommen?", fragte sie unter Tränen. "Du bist hier nicht sicher. Eigentlich ist hier niemand sicher."

   Erst jetzt bemerkte die Königin die Blutergüsse an Schneewittchens Armen, die nur dürftig vom Ärmel aus Spitze bedeckt wurden. Schneewittchen bemerkte den Blick und lachte freudlos. "Glaub mir, meine Arme sehen noch harmlos aus."
5. Der Prinz lachte freundlich . . . "Würdet Ihr mir die Ehre eines Tanzes erweisen?" . . .

   "Nur zu gerne", antwortete sie deshalb und ergriff den dargebotenen Arm des Prinzen. Dieser führte sie zum Feuer, das in einem großen Kamin brannte.

   "Ich habe Euch ganz besondere Tanzschuhe vorbereiten lassen", plauderte er, während sie sich einen Weg durch die Menge bahnten.

   "Oh, ich tanze gerne in meinen eigenen Schuhen", antwortete die Königin, die sich fragte, was er wohl im Schilde führte.

   Auf ein Winken des Prinzen holte ein Diener mit einer Zange eiserne Schuhe aus dem Feuer, welche vor Hitze glühten.

   "Was glaubt Ihr, wie lange könnt Ihr darin tanzen, bevor Ihr tot umfallt?", überlegte der Prinz. "Eine Minute? Oder doch eine Stunde?" . . .

   "Zwei Goldtaler, dass sie keinen einzigen Schritt machen kann!", brüllte jemand, und im nächsten Moment war die Luft angefüllt von Stimmengewirr. Wetten wurden angeboten und entgegengenommen, Vermutungen geäußert, wie sich solche Schuhe wohl anfühlen mochten, und vor allem gelacht . . .

   Zwei Wachen hielten nun die Königin fest, während der Prinz sich persönlich herunterbeugte und . . . stopften ihre Füße mit Gewalt in die glühenden Schuhe.

   Halb wahnsinnig vor Schmerz stolperte sie hier hin und dort hin, bis der Prinz sie einfing.

   "Musik!", rief er, und als die Musikanten wieder aufspielten, wirbelte er die schreiende Frau durch den ganzen Ballsaal. Die Gäste applaudierten und johlten, als die Königin schließlich zu Boden ging. Einzig Schneewittchen stand in ihrem Brautkleid mitten unter den Gästen und weinte.
6. Man merkt, dass du dir wirklich Gedanken um alle Details, die man verändern muss, gemacht hast und überhaupt . . . es macht alles so viel Sinn, dass man glauben möchte, dass sich die Märchen in Wirklichkeit genau so zugetragen haben und nur durch Gerüchte zu dem geworden sind, wie man sie heute kennt:)
7. Du hast mein Hauptanliegen erkannt: Eine Geschichte zu schreiben, aus der sich das bekannte Märchen hätte ableiten können, sei es, weil sie nur mündlich weitererzählt wird (da wird dann aus einem menschlichen "bösen Wolf" schon mal ein tierischer) oder weil nur eine Seite der Geschichte erzählt wird (sodass eine freundliche Kräuterfrau zur bösen Hexe wird).
8. "Ich hatte es satt, dieses ganze langweilige Leben! Ständig sind irgendwelche Narren um mich herumscharwenzelt und diese Feen- schrecklich! Ständig betüttelten sie mich, wollten mich in irgendwelche furchtbaren, pinken Kleider quetschen und nie hatte ich mal eine ruhige Minute.

   Meine einzige Freundin wurde dann, ironischerweise, die dunkle Fee.

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Ich hab mich bei ihr entschuldigt, weil man sie bei den Einladungen übergangen hatte. Sie hat mir dann geholfen. Sie hat alle in Schlaf versetzt und die Dornenhecke entstehen lassen und ich kann endlich alles tun und lassen, was ich will- und ich hab meine Ruhe!" Sie klang sehr zufrieden.

9. Other aspects of these comments are the representations of paralinguistic and physical cues contained within them. With these cues, online communities vary quite substantially from the traditional written register. The cues seek to denote facial expressions or body movements that are not visible to the reader. For example: "XDD" (excited happiness) and "^^" (smiling eyes)
10. Wie sich die "Prinzessinnen" einfach selbstständig machen, das ist einfach super! Diese Bissige Art, die man von ihnen sonst nicht wirklich gewohnt ist,einfach zum totlachen XDD vor allem diese (Achtung Sarkasmus) überaus schlauen Prinzchen, einfach toll;)
11. Woah!

    Ich finds toll, wie du den 3 Prinzessinnen hilfst den Prinzen mal ihre Meinung zu sagen!
12. Die Augen fielen ihm zu und das letzte, was er sah, bevor er- für wahrscheinlich immer!- einschlief . . ., war das grinsende Gesicht von Dornröschen./Und wenn er nicht gestorben ist, dann schläft er auch noch heute!

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